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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001924

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR IN KWARA STATE: INFLUENTIAL EMIR SPEAKS  
CANDIDLY ABOUT NIGERIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary. During a September 21-22, 2008, trip to Kwara State, Ambassador Sanders paid a courtesy visit on the well-respected and influential Emir of Ilorin, Alhaji Ibrahim Kolapo Sulu Gambari. The Emir, a former appeals court judge and cousin of UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari, stepped out of his official role to have a frank sidebar discussion with the Ambassador about the judicial climate in Nigeria. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) When Ambassador Sanders arrived for a courtesy visit at the Emir's Palace in Ilorin, Kwara State, the Emir, Sulu Gambari, came out of his palace to greet the Ambassador and extended his hand in a very non-traditional welcome. It was clear from the beginning that the Emir was presenting the meeting covered by the media in a very western fashion to underscore his belief in modern practices and a positive disposition to the U.S.

¶3. (C) After a formal ceremony of introductions, the Emir, a former appeals court judge, stepped out of his official role for nearly 15 minutes to have a sidebar discussion with the Ambassador in response to questions about the judicial climate in Nigeria. The discussion took place in very whispered tones given the presence of the Royal Court and the media, but the Emir wanted to let the Ambassador know that he was available to work with the USG to move democracy forward in Nigeria. The Ambassador asked the Emir how he felt about the integrity of the judiciary in Nigeria to date, especially given the current political atmosphere. He said the judiciary needed further development, and expressed concern about the integrity and bona fides of some of the judges at all levels of the court system as he was aware that some of them had been and are subject to taking bribes. He was particularly supportive of one of his contemporaries, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Idris Legbo Kutigi, saying, "I have confidence that he is above reproach." However, he did not believe some of the other judges really understood the meaning of integrity and hoped the USG could provide capacity building and technical assistance to ensure judges understand the rule of law and their ethical responsibilities as guardians of both the legal system and the people of Nigeria. On the upcoming Supreme Court ruling on the President, Emir Gambari said he was confident that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court will ensure the right thing is done for the country.

¶4. (SBU) On the democracy front, the Emir said countries like the U.S. and UK, which most Nigerians look up to and recognize as partners given their strong ties, must bear in

mind that Nigeria "is a work in progress and it may stumble from time to time in its efforts toward being a more robust democracy." He stressed that neither the U.S. nor UK should doubt the "commitment of the Yar'Adua administration's efforts to ensure that democracy moves forward." He said Nigeria needs "time and space to develop its democracy," and it counts on the U.S. and UK to help it get there, but stated bluntly, "Every time Nigeria stumbles on the democracy path the U.S. cannot overreact."

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador said she appreciated the Emir's frankness, as well as his willingness to dialog with her and keep in touch. She expressed gratitude for his welcoming remarks in support of the friendship that exists between Nigeria and the U.S., but also conveyed USG concerns about corruption and its impact on Nigerian democracy. She said the USG is looking to see results in this area, "more than we have seen in the last several months." The Emir agreed, noting, for example, that the previous director of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Nuhu Ribadu, enjoyed international prestige and did a good job, but since his departure the institution needed to get back on track. He again underscored that Nigeria's democracy is a work in progress and that as Emir he is willing to work with the USG to address issues such as corruption and development.

¶6. (SBU) The Emir clearly made an effort to create an open atmosphere for the Ambassador's courtesy visit. He was the first Emir to come out of the palace to receive the Ambassador, and only the second to extend a hand to shake. He also publicly held the Royal Court at bay to have a private

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15 minute discussion with the Ambassador, which also is not customary.

¶7. (SBU) In a related meeting with the first lady of Kwara State on September 21, she told the Ambassador about the Emir's support of polio campaigns and his public efforts to convince those around him with doubts about the vaccine, by having his recently born twins receive the immunization in front of the media in the center of the old city. The first lady also thanked the Ambassador for all the information she forwarded on ways to address and raise awareness on the importance of polio vaccination. The Ambassador also said she would be reaching out to the Emir on this issue and sending information on our support of polio campaigns.

¶8. (SBU) Comment. Sulu Gambari is a moderate yet well-respected Emir in Kwara State. This may stem from his years as a judge, including his tenure as Justice of the Nigerian Court of Appeals. According to press reports, when a Christian church was burned in Ilorin last year the Emir publicly condemned the act and appealed to Muslims and Christians in the state to "avoid any act that could tarnish the principles of their religion," stating, "Islam is known for peace and Muslims should avoid anything that could create unrest." End Comment.  
SANDERS